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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 001145

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [OIIP](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: Coverage of suicide bombing by alleged Tamil  
Tiger in Colombo

Ref: Colombo 1142

1. (U) SUMMARY. Per Reftel, on July 7, a suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide bomber detonated a bomb inside a police station in the heart of downtown Colombo, near the Prime Minister's office, U.S. Embassy and British High Commission. The suspected target of the suicide bomber -- a young woman -- was a Tamil politician, Douglas Devananda, a vocal critic of the LTTE and current Cabinet minister. Four police officers and the bomber were killed and twelve people injured. Headlines, both English and vernacular, July 8-9 were largely devoted to factual coverage of the attack and how it would affect the peace process. Late July 8, the Tigers denied involvement in the attack through pro-LTTE website "TamilNet," as well as through an interview with an AP correspondent. Editorial comment surrounding the incident questioned whether the bombing would adversely affect the peace process. END SUMMARY.

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Headlines  
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2. (U) Headlines uniformly focused on the bombing, its supposed target and possible repercussions for the peace process. Independent English DAILY MIRROR, (07/08) reported:

- Attempt on Devananda's life fails
- Four policemen killed, ten injured; Govt. condemns attack
- Devananda says terror can't stop his mission
- Suicide bomb rips hole in last hour of trading
- Business community aghast over blast

DAILY MIRROR (07/09)

- Blast won't affect peace process - JVP

Independent Sinhala daily, LANKADEEPA (07/08) said: Effort to assassinate Devananda in his ministry unsuccessful; four in police service give their lives

Pro-LTTE Tamil daily SUDAR OLI reported under the headlines (07/08): Suicidal bomb blast inside the Colpetty police station -- five, including a police inspector dead; 10 injured -- Was Minister Douglas Devananda the target?

Government-owned DAILY NEWS (07/08) Devananda survives 10th assassination bid -- woman Black Tiger blows herself up, four killed

- Tiger feline's failed mission
- President does not expect any change to peace process
- Govt. condemns attempted assassination on Devananda

DAILY NEWS (07/09)

- Bomb blast not against peace process - UPFA
- LTTE denies involvement in attack

3. (U) Independent English daily ISLAND (07/08) said: Govt. raises bomb attack with Oslo

- Revive peace process - UNP to Govt.
- EPDP wants CBK to pursue peace even after assassination bid
- Govt. condemns blast without naming perpetrator
- Suicide bomb triggers selling on bourse

ISLAND (07/09)

- SLMM warns Govt. and Tigers - forces say LTTE responsible; Tigers deny
- Petersen hopes truce will hold

14. (U) Also of note was the Tigers' denial of involvement in the attack:

- Pro-LTTE website "TamilNet" stated that Tiger political chief S.P. Thamilselvan has said the Tigers had "absolutely no connection in the suicide bombing in Colombo. This is an act to destabilize the peace process. We suspect this has been carried out by elements that want to disrupt the peace process."

- In an interview with an AP correspondent that appeared on Lanka Academic, a local independent website, Thamilselvan reportedly said that the Tigers "condemn this attempted assassination," and that the group denied any involvement in the bombing, saying that "it may have been carried out by some anti-peace elements."

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Editorial excerpts:  
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15. (U) Under the header "Dastardly attack," the government-owned English DAILY NEWS (07/08) commented: "The bomb blast in the heart of Colombo yesterday, which claimed almost half a dozen lives and injured several others, meets with our strongest condemnation. The evidence at the time of writing is that the explosion was the work of a woman suicide bomber who was awaiting a meeting with EPDP leader and Minister of State, Douglas Devananda. She apparently detonated the bomb, which was on her person when she was whisked off for questioning by the Police. Inasmuch as the loss of lives in this incident meets with our forthright condemnation we also bemoan the human suffering the tragedy has engendered. We offer our heartfelt condolences to those who have lost their loved ones in this outrage, which has caused considerable concern and anxiety among the public.... For, Devananda has not only said 'no' to and vehemently and steadfastly opposed tyranny and anti-democratic forces in the North-East but has also been a rallying-point of anti-authoritarian forces in the region. He is a battle-hardened, anti-LTTE campaigner who has proved his mettle in the violent politics of the North and East and the body politic owes it to him to give him all the support that could be legitimately provided to him. It is obvious that it is only those forces, which are repressive of the people's democratic aspirations, who would be eager to see an end to Douglas Devananda, who is now working alongside the Government in its efforts to serve the people."

16. (U) The DAILY NEWS followed up on 07/09 under the header: "Persist with peace effort": President Kumaratunga's brief but cogent statement on the aborted attempt on the life of Minister Douglas Devananda, helped to dispel the gloom and fears the incident has generated in some quarters on the future of the peace process. The peace process would no way be affected by this development, the President clarified, raising hopes thereby, that the search for peace would continue uninterrupted.... this incident was in a category which was entirely different from that in which the peace process could be placed. Accordingly, the peace process wouldn't be derailed by the bomb attack which was aimed at ending an individual life.... Nevertheless, kicking starting the peace process should be now considered of the first importance. It is only a just and negotiated peace, which could render bombs and bullets superfluous and needless. The Colpetty blast should also alert the SLMM to the need to ensure scrupulous adherence to the letter and spirit of the Ceasefire Agreement. Ambivalence on the part of anyone on the terms of the ceasefire could prove perilous. Although individual killings cannot put the brakes on the peace effort, they could sour the atmosphere in which talks are held."

17. (U) Under the header "Hear no LTTE, see no LTTE and speak no LTTE?" the independent English daily ISLAND commented on 07/09: The LTTE bomber who blew herself up on Wednesday together with four policemen has exploded a powerful myth: the LTTE is for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The bomber missed her target, Minister Douglas Devananda, but she accomplished her mission by conveying Prabhakaran's message wrapped in plastic explosives: 'The LTTE doesn't care a damn about world opinion. The blast came as no surprise. It has been clear from the beginning that Prabhakaran is no respecter of the fragile truce, which he has violated with gay abandon over 2,000 times.... If anyone believes that Prabhakaran has blundered by sending a 'child of fire' to Colombo as he will have to face the opprobrium of the world for that he or she is sadly mistaken.... In a few days the blast will be forgotten and foreign diplomats will queue up at the entrance to Prabhakaran's bunker in the Wanni to pay "pooja" to him.. Human rights groups.... are mum when Prabhakaran brainwashes girls and makes them blow themselves up so as to boost his ego and increase his bargaining power.... it is doubtful that the LTTE may want to torpedo the peace process at this juncture, as it has hitherto been a milch cow for the outfit.

18. (U) Under the header "Avoid destabilization of the country", independent daily ISLAND commented on 07/08: "The suicide bomb blast in the Colpetty police station on Wednesday, among other things, confirms the fears and suspicions that tormented the people from the time the peace process started wobbling as a result of the contentious political manipulations in the south. This incident confirms the presence in Colombo City of dreaded suicide bombers ready to carry out destructive operations. It is clear now that the dismantling of security measures with the coming into force of the ceasefire, though a beneficial measure has provided unhindered mobility to agents of destruction. Of course, doubts and suspicions have not ceased to

circulate.... Most government spokespersons have glibly announced that the present incident will not, in any way, hinder the peace process. President Chandrika Kumaratunga was particularly emphatic about her intention to conduct the peace process to a conclusion, whatever the obstacles that stand in her way. Her determination is indeed commendable.... What is disconcerting, however, is that these concern leaders lack the required courage, wisdom or magnanimity to sink their narrow party differences and unite to save the country from possible disaster.... These politicians have now to decide whether they will stay mired in these parochial squabbles or take swift action to resolve the national issue through a common approach, without driving the country to total destabilization."

9. (U) Under the header "Peace bomb (let's identify Prabhakaran)" independent Sinhala daily DIVAINA (07/09) commented: "The recent suicide bomb tarnishes the image of Solheim, SLMM, peace delegates... Prabhakaran has done a serious crime to all of those who tried hard to show the world that he is a noble citizen. This bombing occurred just three days after a Tiger leader claimed on Black Tiger Day that the LTTE hated war. This bomb explosion has shattered the peace process. Although there were several violations like killings of military intelligence operatives, smuggling of arms.... this was the very first bomb that exploded during the truce. Devananda -- a long time target of the LTTE, has shunned bloody politics and is now hand in hand with Karuna. The LTTE is aware of the massive change he can make happen with Karuna in the East in future elections. That is why the young woman was sent to Colombo with a bomb to finish him off. She should one of the several young men and women who made use of the peace avenue to come with arms to Colombo during the truce! The bottom line is that the time has come to identify Prabhakaran, who plants bombs along the peace avenue. His message is only of war. The cunning politicians at this end should bear that in mind."

10. (U) Under the header "Is the door to peace closing down?" pro-LT Tamil daily SUDAR OLI (07/08) commented: "After two and half years a bomb explosion has taken place in Colombo. We have been continuously writing in this column about the danger that is nearing.... This suicidal bomb blast cannot be set aside as just another incident.... Though the peace talks that started during the UNF government had setbacks in the midway the understanding and trust that remained gave hopes that the peace talks could move forward.... The understanding between the government and the LTTE started to wane with the president taking over the defense ministry and is now at the lowest level. The president joining with the JVP, a party that has always opposed peace talks, in forming a government and the way she handled the Karuna affair, trying to divide the Tamil community, are leading the country to a war.... Who can change the fate of the country and its people if the people rally around the leadership that is preparing for a war? People and the country are to decide whether they are for war or peace."

11. (U) Under the headline "Echo of the bomb blast," independent Tamil daily VIRAKESARI (07/09) commented: "After a long interval, a suicide bomber has gone to pieces in Colombo killing four police personnel and wounding another 14. It is said that the target was minister Douglas Devananda.... This bomb blast, the first after October 2001, has sent shock waves among people.... We cannot deny that the delay in the resumption of the peace talks has paved way for this bomb blast.... Whatever the motives behind this bomb blast, such an act should be condemned.... We have to point out that this incident is warning to those who obstruct the peace efforts.... All should realize when the peace process gets delayed the environment for such violence is automatically created.... Condemnation has come from all walks of life including the LTTE, which has denied any involvement.... The LTTE has also said that such incidents could further obstruct the peace efforts.... While condemning the bomb blast the president has assured that the peace talks would resume soon."

12. (U) Under the header "Clear diversion," independent Tamil daily THINAKKURAL (07/09) commented: "For the first time, after the ceasefire agreement was signed in February 2002, a suicide bomb attack took place in Colombo on Wednesday.... It is said that the suicide bomber's target was minister Douglas Devananda.... While the UPFA condemned the attempt on minister Devananda's life, the president in interview with the ITN said that the incident would not affect the peace process as it is on a better footing.... They clearly show that there is a threat to the ceasefire agreement.... It is important that the peace talks are resumed soon if to stop the acceleration of violence.... The Kumaratunga government should look for new avenues to commence the peace talks with the LTTE as soon as possible.... As peace-loving people we anticipate that both parties would realize that the misunderstandings between the two parties is a barrier to the commencement of talks and that action should be taken from both sides to bridge this gap."

Lunstead